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"Find their Level". African American Roots Tourism in Sierra Leone and Ghana

« Trouver sa place » — Tourisme de racines africaines-américaines en Sierra Leone et au Ghana

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Adia Benton & Kwame Zulu Shabazz

"Find their Level"

African American Roots Tourism in Sierra Leone and Ghana

"Just as a tree without roots is dead, a people without history or cultural roots also becomes a dead people [...]. You take a tree, you can tell what kind of tree it is by looking at the leaves. If the leaves are gone, you can look at the bark [...]. But when you find a tree with the leaves gone and the bark gone, everything gone, you call that a what? A stump. And you can't identify a stump as easily as you can identify a tree."
Malcolm X (1967)

"I heard the truth was in my roots, but I haven't seen a tree all day [...]. What about the leaves on trees with broken branches? Where will they go after they've done their dances in the wind? Will they cry or simply die?"
Fertile Ground (2000)

In many "developing" and post-conflict African nations, cultural tourism has been touted as a vital source of foreign exchange revenue for jumpstarting national development. This trend has led to a scramble in Africa by African state officials seeking to "package" their nations in order to attract foreign capital[1]. In both Ghana and Sierra Leone, marketing logic has become pervasive amongst political elites who have sought to attract the

1. Tourism is currently Ghana's fourth largest foreign exchange earner behind gold, cocoa, and timber (in that order). Sierra Leone's tourist industry is not as robust as Ghana's. The Sierra Leone Tourist Board is actively promoting their new tourism industry; yet, there are no data showing the effects of their efforts. They do note that the war has hampered the tourist industry's growth; thus, it is unlikely they are witnessing significant foreign exchange earnings comparable to Ghana's.

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patronage of diasporan "returnees"—descendants of the Middle Passage[2] who travel to Africa in search of cultural and historical "roots". The planning and execution of national "packaging" often circumvents the ordinary citizen; thus, the official agenda of these nation-states is sometimes at odds with the aspirations of local Ghanaians, Sierra Leoneans and pan-African sojourners alike. Moreover, this trend has contributed to considerable conceptual slippage and, consequently, vociferous debates over the meaning of and criteria for asserting Africanness. In other instances, these conjunctures have transformed and enhanced received notions of African identity.

As African American anthropologists[3], "privileged" citizens of a hyperdeveloped superpower, and members of a marginalized racial group, we, the authors, share a deep commitment to social justice and race consciousness[4]. In the US, race is a pervasive signifier of economic, social and political asymmetries. But in Ghana and Sierra Leone, while race is important, distinctions such as class and ethnicity are much more salient[5]. Our African interlocutors often attempt to fit us into categories that are meaningful to them:

"Where [in Africa] are you from?"
"Are you Ghanaian/Sierra Leonean?"
"What is your tribe?"
"Are you a pure African?"
"Where is your village?"
"Who are your ancestors?"

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2. The rise of president-elect Barack Obama foregrounds a demographic revolution: for the first time in history, voluntary emigration from Africa to the New World has outstripped the forced emigration of their enslaved African ancestors (ROBERTS 2005)—African American and African diaspora(n) ain't what they used to be. For an excellent historical overview of this sea change and the global context that has enabled it, see AKYEAMPONG (2000). For a localized ethnographic analysis of this phenomenon, see MATORY (1999). While we acknowledge the importance of these transformations, we maintain that the "traditional" usage of African American and African diaspora(n) is still an analytically significant distinction (for example, although Obama has embraced the ethnonym "African American", most neo-African Americans self-identify as "Africanour" usage of these two terms to the descendants of the Middle Passage.
3. Many black/African cultural nationalists believe that anthropology can only be a tool of oppression. Many scholars agree that anthropology was in the past intimately linked to colonialism (see especially RIGBY (1996) and MUDIMBE (1988). See MOORE (1996) for a dissenting view. But to its credit, anthropology has also advanced the Weberian principle of Verstehen, an empathic portrayal of difference, and the Boasian notion thave found to be imminently useful.
4. As advocates of race consciousness, we believe that so long as white supremacy exists we can best combat it collectively as black/African people. We reject the mainstream scholarly and journalistic proclivity to either pathologize blackness/Africanness or, erase it altogether by reducing it, to borrow MALCOLM X's (1967) felicitous phrasing, "racism in reverse". There are, however, important differences in our outlooks. Shabazz, for instance, self-identifies as a black nationalist, while Benton does not.
5. For a provocative analysis of why race matters in Ghana, see PIERRE (2009).

"Are your parents African/Ghanaian/Sierra Leonean?"
"Do you have a Ghanaian/Sierra Leonean passport?"
"Are you a slave?"
"You are a Big Man/Woman"[6]
"Are you a white person/stranger?"

These engagements remind us that as scholars using anthropologically informed rituals of observation and participation, we, too, are the subjects of observation, critique, and local theorizing. This hermeneutical circle (Apter 1992: 213) informs our self-perceptions as engaged scholars who, hopefully, advance research agendas that can facilitate and enhance cross-cultural dialogue, understanding and collaboration.

In this essay, we compare a developing nation (Ghana) and a post-conflict nation (Sierra Leone) to deepen and complicate our understandings of an emerging pan-African phenomenon—African roots tourism—and its attendant possibilities, limitations, and ambiguities. We consider how these complimentary and conflicting interests, beliefs, and practices converge to shape novel modes of pilgrimage, nationhood, and transnational dialogue. In the sections that follow, we work toward two general objectives: first, we analyze the context wherein Africanness has been deployed as an instructive model of counter-globalism[7], the considerable geopolitical stakes involved in these deployments, along with the countervailing forces of conservativism, reformism and radical transformation that are inherent therein. And, second, we offer a corrective to scholarly overemphasis on divergence and dissonance between Africans and African Americans by providing equally instructive examples of affinity and cooperation.

Roots as a Postmodern Problematic

The metaphor of roots as imagined ancestral homeland has been a source of intense sociopolitical struggle (Malcolm X 1967; Thelwell 2003) and considerable scholarly scrutiny (Brown 2005; Bruner 1996; Campbell 2006; Clarke 1992; Clarke 2004; Ebron 1999; Finley 2001; Gaines 1999, 2006; Hartman 2002, 2007; Hasty 2002; Holsey 2008; Lake 1995; Matory 1999; Osei-Tutu 2002). Much of the scholarly scepticism is informed by post-modern thought and falls under the rubric of anti-essentialism (Appiah 1993; Gilroy 1993). At the core of postmodern critiques of roots-as-identity is

6. *i.e.,* a person of high social standing, a wealthy person.
7. In using "counter-globalism", we do not suggest that all Africans or African American roots travelers are consciously reacting to globalization. Although some within these respective groups do explicitly shape culturalist responses to global capital and its attendant potentialities and woes, our point is that global consequences and implications do not necessarily require that itinerant black diasporan and local African actors possess explicit knowledge of these outcomes.

a conviction that sodalities based on race or geography are at best, exclusivist and, at worst, racist. Moreover, according to these critics, the "roots" metaphor indexes subjectivities that presuppose discrete, bounded, and timeless notions of personhood. Accordingly, these scholars argue, "rooted" identities typically lack particularity and ignore the interplay of historical and political contingencies, promulgating un-nuanced generalizations of self and others.

A related critique is that the roots-as-identity trope reduces "the homeland" to an originary site with no socio-historical dynamic of its own—aside from its role in diffusing peoples and cultures to other places. Homelands, in other words, are relegated to the past and to a site elsewhere, while its diasporas are located in the present. Challenging the notion that the arrows of historical change and spatial dynamism are unidirectional, Matory (1999) shows how the diaspora, Brazilian free blacks and recaptives[8] in Lagos, Nigeria, was the chief architect of its homeland. This ironic example shows that discourses and practices that fix Africa in a remote and timeless past are, from an empirical standpoint, untenable[9].

The Dialectics of Brutality and Dignity

The idea and pursuit of African roots are dialectical manifestations of both brutal ascriptions and defiant self-fashionings. Or, more accurately, brutality and defiance demarcate the limits within which these dialectical struggles are staged. During the transatlantic slave trade, perhaps over one hundred million Africans were killed or captured by European slave-traders and their African collaborators. Scholars estimate that the number of Africans who landed in the Americas—those who survived capture and the subsequent Middle Passage—falls between nine and twenty million (Curtin 1969; Inikori 1976; Inikori & Engerman 1992; Lovejoy 1983). The triangular circulation of Africans, African technologies, African resources, rum, guns, steel, sugar, salt, gold, textiles, and so on, linked the two hemispheres in new and enduring ways; moreover, this horrific event has created global consequences—social, political, economic and cultural—that are being reckoned with today.

One such consequence is the idea that there was place called "Africa" inhabited by an inferior race of people called "Africans" (Campbell 2006: 10-11). In the New World, the enslaved victims of this "enterprise" gradually, and to varying degrees, came to see themselves as "Africans", as their direct knowledge of their ancestral lands declined over time and space.

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8. Africans redeemed from slave vessels by the British Navy following the abolishment of the slave trade (1807) in the United Kingdom.
9. That is not to say that we should dismiss self-presentations that evoke timelessness; rather, we should be attentive to the purposes and meanings for which these identity constructions are formulated and asserted.

Oral histories, historical "memory", print media, rumor, linguistic and cultural self-segregation, and interaction between African creoles[10] and newly arrived enslaved Africans are just a few factors guaranteeing the ongoing, dynamic interface of these re-imagined self-identities. Sierra Leone, in particular, is a key site for understanding this interface, given its early history as a site selected for the return of liberated slaves, and later, for proselytization/civilization of native-born Africans by African diasporans.

Analogous processes in Africa and Afro-western Europe gradually matured to complement this emerging diasporic sentiment: "Africanness" became a source of solidarity against Euro-colonialism. These processes coalesced, albeit imperfectly, while maintaining their respective internal complexities, to foster among some Africans and African diasporans a sense of universal struggle against black subordination. With this in mind, we turn to what we feel is a contemporary example of this phenomenon—African roots tourism.

Although derivative of these past processes, we do not claim that the contemporary discourses and practices we analyze are perennial reproductions of the past. Rather, we emphasize that Africanness—what Africa is and what it means to *be* African—is constantly deployed, contested, and revaluated within and outside the imagined, elastic boundaries of its referent—Africa. Nor do we claim that these discourses and practices are examples of "globalization gone wild" (Bruner 2001). Rather, we assert that African roots tourism is a product of a complex array of self-interested, if unequally empowered, actors, transnational solidarity networks (pan-Africanist, Black Nationalist, Afrocentrist), technologies (Internet, cell phones, commercial jetliners, polymerase chain reaction) and structural enablers/constraints (global capital, non-governmental agencies, civil society) of varying scale (local, regional, continental, and global). In the subsequent sections, we highlight the role that two particular nations—Ghana and Sierra Leone—play in this contemporary discourse and practice around Africanness.

Sierra Leone: Back to Africa

Settled in the late 1790s by a few hundred "Black Poor" from England and freed blacks who fought with the British during the American War of Independence, Sierra Leone has long been significant for "generations of African Americans struggling to make sense of their relationship to Africa" (Campbell 2006: 16). After the British abolished the capture and sale of African people as slaves in 1807, the British navy intercepted slave ships, and sent the "human cargo" to live in Sierra Leone. Today, the descendants

10. *i.e.,* enslaved Africans born in the Americas. The nightmarish journey across the Atlantic, generations of creolization in the North America and African blood spilt (metaphorically and literally) on North American soil would eventually lead to a rival notion of self-hood—African American (MINTZ & PRICE 1992).

of these tens of thousands of "recaptives" call themselves Krio, and count various groups—Yoruba, Igbo, Kongo—among their ancestors.

The circulation of black people among continents continued to characterize Sierra Leone throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the 1810s African Americans began traveling to Sierra Leone, seeking to save souls and civilize the fledgling nation. And, reversing this traffic, native-born Sierra Leoneans seeking Western education, journeyed to Western Europe and the US[11]. Some scholars have argued that, during the 19th century, Freetown served as the birthplace for "political nationalism" and conscious Africanism (Hair 1967: 526). One pivotal figure that embodied this transnational movement and the origin of pan-African ideals is Edward Wilmot Blyden. Born on the Caribbean island of St Thomas in 1832 to Igbo parents, Blyden emigrated to Liberia in 1851, and later settled in Sierra Leone in 1871. While in West Africa, he vociferously opposed European repression and paternalism. In 1872, only a year after he settled in Freetown, he established *The Negro* newspaper. Regarding the name of the newspaper, Blyden wrote:

> "It has been called the 'Negro' (if any explanation is necessary) because it is intended to represent and defend the interest of that peculiar type of humanity known as the Negro with all its affiliated and collected branches whether on this continent or elsewhere. 'West African' was considered definite enough, but too exclusive for the comprehensive intention entertained by the promoters of the scheme, viz: to recognize and greet the brotherhood of the race wherever found" (Frenkel 1974: 284-285).

Although Blyden contested (and lost) presidential elections in Liberia, he lived in Sierra Leone for most of his life, eventually dying there in 1912. Blyden's ideas are widely considered to be the precursor to negritude and pan-African thought; at all stages of his work he championed racial pride among African peoples, a deep love for Africa, and a belief in African renaissance (Frenkel 1974).

Athens of West Africa

Into the 20th century, Sierra Leone, and Freetown, in particular, was a beacon for African renaissance. The city's Fourah Bay College attracted students from all over West Africa, and contributed to Freetown's reputation as the "Athens of West Africa". Despite a gloried history of resistance and anti-imperialism, Sierra Leone, unlike in other parts of West Africa, had an anti-colonial movement limited in its scope and popular appeal, even as it resulted in the withdrawal of British colonial rule in 1961 (Braithwaite

11. It is important to note that movement among West African states was also common during these periods (THORNTON 1998).

1962). Three decades of relative peace were followed by a rebel insurgency in 1991 which sought to re-balance the effects of decades of post-colonial graft and uneven distribution of resources.

Post-conflict Reconstruction through Tourism

Five years ago, Sierra Leone emerged from that ten-year civil war that displaced nearly half of its five million people. Characterized by most Western and African media as a rebel war without a cause, the country has struggled to rebuild its economy, its infrastructure, and a collective sense of stability. In addition to extracting natural resources like diamonds, gold and bauxite, the government and foreign investors have focused on reviving Sierra Leone's nearly defunct tourist industry. As the government grapples with developing the infrastructure necessary to entice Europeans to Freetown's beaches, or the hills of Kabala, investors and outsiders have touted the "value of roots" and its potential for infusing foreign currency into Sierra Leone's economy (*African Investor* 2007: 80). Sierra Leone claims a "direct" connection to African Americans in the southeastern US, citing anthropological evidence of southern blacks' descent from the rice-growing Mende people of Sierra Leone *(ibid.)*. With the growing popularity of genetic ancestry testing among black Americans, and with 30-40 % of DNA tests indicating Mende and Temne ancestry, Sierra Leone expects an increased number of African American roots travelers (Bolnick *et al.* 2007)[12].

Direct Roots and Homecomings

More recently, new agendas on both sides of the Atlantic motivated a third wave of homecomings. Sierra Leoneans and African Americans have clamored for demonstrable, specific, and direct links between Sierra Leone and the US, reflecting a desire for interaction and collaboration. Joseph Opala, an American anthropologist who has worked in Sierra Leone since the 1970s, described his role in mediating the mutual interest and curiosity among Sierra Leoneans and African Americans with links to Sierra Leone:

12. Ghana's official government website <www.touringghana.com> outlines a ten-point plan, the Joseph Project, to deepen ties between "homelanders" and "diasporans". Point ten involves developing a genetic database that would "establish for every returnee/pilgrim interested, a personal report on his/her antecedents" that would facilitate "visits to the villages of the[ir] ancestors". There are problems with using DNA as a definitive "answer" to questions about ancestry. For a more detailed discussion of the science informing these tests, and some of the historical questions these tests raise, see BENTON (2006) and DUSTER (2006).

"My greatest pleasure [...] was sharing my historical findings with Sierra Leoneans [...] when I first announced that had I traced some of the slaves taken away from Sierra Leone to a particular place in America, people were ecstatic. Sierra Leoneans never dreamed of finding their lost family, and the response was so strong I was taken aback. Suddenly, every newspaper and radio station in the country wanted to interview me, and many schools and community groups wanted me to speak. Everywhere I went the questions tumbled out: How did you trace the slaves? Where were they taken? Why were they taken there? What are their descendants like today?"

The first set of the connections were made through "Gullah homecomings", with the first in 1989, and a second one in 1997. The Gullah people are the African Americans who live in coastal South Carolina and Georgia today, the descendants of the rice-growing Africans brought from Sierra Leone and other parts of the Rice Coast[13]. They live in what is called South Carolina's low country, on the southern coast of the state, and on the sea islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Though linguists and anthropologists have questioned the extent to which the linguistic and cultural links between Africa and North America have been preserved, the group is known for having preserved more of their African language and culture than any other black community in the US.

According to Opala, who, aside from Lorenzo Dow Turner[14], helped to make these connections more widely known, each homecoming has been more specific than the last, reflecting the increasing knowledge produced about the connection between Gullah and West African culture by scholars working in the Atlantic region. The first reunion, or homecoming, which occurred in 1989, involved Gullah leaders interested in their links to Sierra Leone, but with no known personal connection to that country. The Moran Family Homecoming in 1997 involved a family from coastal Georgia that had preserved a song in Mende from a specific village, passing it down for two hundred years. But what would eventually be called Priscilla's Homecoming (2005)[15] was the most specific. Records collected in Sierra Leone and the US linked a US family to a girl named Priscilla, who was enslaved and transported to the US from Bunce Island, Sierra Leone, in 1756.

In July 2003, having learned of this link from Opala, the government of Sierra Leone sent an invitation letter to Thomalind Martin Polite asking her to participate in a "homecoming" ceremony in the country:

"There is every reason to believe that your ancestor, Priscilla, came from our country and that Sierra Leone is your ancestral home [...]. [We] can assure you that your

13. The rice coast (or grain coast) complex consisted of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Gambia (CARNEY 2001).
14. Turner (b. August 21, 1890 - d. 1972) was an African American linguist who was the first to suggest and document similarities between West African languages and Gullah dialect.
15. Among the sponsors for Priscilla's Homecoming were: Sierra Leone's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, and the National Tourist Board, the US Embassy, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Sierra Leone. There were also numerous sponsors in South Carolina and Rhode Island.

visit will be well publicized here [...] and that thousands of our people will be anxious to greet you, their long-lost family come home from South Carolina."

Polite was, indeed, welcomed with great fanfare and a series of official ceremonies. During her visit, she also traveled to Bunce Island. Observers posted their travelogues online[16], along with a series of multimedia tools for use by the interested public. A film about Polite's journey to Sierra Leone is currently in production.

Ghana: The "Black Mecca"

During the post-Reconstruction era, which many scholars assert was the nadir of white racial terror in the US, Chief Alfred Sam, a Gold Coast (Ghana) businessman, devised a plan to resettle several hundred "Negroes" at Salt Pond, in what is now the Central Region of Ghana. In 1914, Chief Sam set sail from Norfolk, Virginia with sixty black American emigrants, mostly from the Midwestern state of Oklahoma[17]. The propagandist for Chief Sam's ambitious program was Reverend Orishatuke Faduma, a Sierra Leonean scholar-activist of Yoruba descent. Faduma expressed his unwavering support for black repatriation and believed that black North Americans' desire to "return" to Africa was not simply a reaction to white oppression: "There was always a feeling among Negroes in the New World to return to Africa, their mother land" (Langley 1973: 71). For reasons ranging from poor organization and planning to strong opposition from British colonial officials, Chief Sam's "Back-to-Africa" scheme was a complete failure. He, nevertheless, inspired or, at least, foretold other "repatriation" efforts—including those of the Jamaican Marcus Garvey, who carried out a similar scheme on a much grander scale[18].

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16. To see the travelogue and information about Polite's journey, visit the following websites: <http://www.yale.edu/glc/priscilla/index.htm> and <http://www.africanaheritage.com/Priscillas_Homecoming.asp>. Both websites focus on the Priscilla's life and how the connection between Thomalind Polite and the young girl was made. They also highlight, to varying extents, the events that took place during the reunion.
17. While it is well-known that some white Americans supported and even spearheaded "back to Africa" movements, the movement was also a threat to the racial status quo and, therefore, posed great danger for blacks. A newspaper editorial written in 1912, "African Recruiter Lynching", explained the deadly consequences: "We do not know the circumstances surrounding the death of this Negro other than the one fact that he was working among his own people endeavoring to get a sufficient number of them to go to Africa [...] [W]hite farmers in the community, who were depending on these Negroes to gather their crops, became angered and decided to nip the movement in the bud by lynching the leader [...] the pitiful part about it is that this lynching, as all others, will go unnoticed by the state and government authorities" (GINZBURG 1988).
18. Marcus Garvey was likely acquainted with Chief Alfred Sam. Garvey's mentor, Duse Mohamed Ali, was publicly skeptical of Chief Sam's Back-to-Africa scheme (LANGLEY 1973).

Less than fifty years later, Ghana has become the "Black Mecca" for African American sojourners to Africa, a distinction it has held since it won its independence from Britain in 1957[19]. At that time, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first head of State, encouraged American and Caribbean blacks to relocate to Ghana and contribute their resources, professional training, and technical experience to the development of Africa. Hundreds of African Americans heeded his call and took up residence in Ghana. Some of these "returnees" played an important role in the early years of Ghana's nation building project (Gaines 1999, 2006). After Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966, virtually all the African Americans in Ghana either left voluntarily or were expelled by the military regime for "national security" reasons.

Ironically, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), which had expressed little interest in Nkrumah's pan-Africanist agenda, now promotes deepening relationships between African Americans and Ghanaians. Moving to put their unique stamp on this effort, the regime set up the Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations, which is tasked with, among other things, strengthening the familial bonds between these two groups. Unlike in the Nkrumah era, none of the recent programs encourage African Americans to resettle in Ghana. Instead, they focus primarily on African Americans as sources of tourist revenue rather than as potential citizens[20].

"Ghana@50: Lets All Celebrate!"

Ghana is celebrated by its "development partners", and self-promoted by Ghanaian elites, as a model African nation. On 6 March 2007, the Ghanaian government embarked upon an ambitious program of celebrations to commemorate the 50th anniversary of its independence and to further solidify its status as the "gateway to Africa". The official theme for the events was "Championing African Excellence". The celebratory mood was encouraged by a theme song which had as its refrain, "Ghana@50: Lets All Celebrate!" Yet, the purpose, intent and even the necessity of celebrating Ghana's Golden Jubilee was debated throughout the nation (Akyeampong & Aikins 2008). One widely publicized debate[21] became so acrimonious that the

19. Ghana receives over 10,000 African American visitors annually, more than any other African nation.
20. Obetsebi-Lamptey explained to a mostly African American audience in Ghana: "We're not saying everybody should get up and relocate back in Africa. No, you built the country over there—you built the wealth over there. Why should you give it up? You should use that wealth over there and bring some of it back here to use it to build up here" (COMMANDER 2007).
21. Even I (Benton), based in Sierra Leone during the celebration, heard the debates among Ghanaians on BBC Africa, and participated in discussions with Sierra Leoneans. Ghanaians in Sierra Leone openly displayed their interest in the celebrations. For example, I attended a four-day workshop led by a Ghanaian physician who, on each day, wore a suit sewn with as many different 50-year

immediate past president of Ghana, Jerry Rawlings, refused to participate in officially sponsored commemoration celebrations (Obeng 2007: 15). Rawlings criticized the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP) on the following counts: it was using the celebrations to mask their "witchhunting"[22], malfeasance and incompetence; the celebrations did not properly acknowledge the contributions of his regime, the National Democratic Convention (NDC); and the impoverished status of the "average" Ghanaian made the celebration a sham. The NPP countered that their (NPP) regime had ushered in unprecedented levels of peace, stability and prosperity and the celebrations should be observed in the spirit of national unity and reconciliation. Public debate often followed party lines, but the events were generally well attended, despite numerous complaints about poor organization. Although there were divergent opinions about the utility, objectives and appropriateness of the celebrations, most conceded that fifty years of independence was an important moment to reflect on the nation's postcolonial accomplishments, failures, and future aims.

The commemorative events included lectures by intellectuals, politicians and traditional authorities; beach parties, parades and cultural performances; and gospel, hiplife (Ghanian rap/hiphop music), reggae and highlife concerts. In addition, the government developed specific programs to promote and attract roots tourism, with a special emphasis on black North American cultural tourists: the Emancipation Day[23] observance of the 200th anniversary of the abolishment of the slave trade by Britain; PANAFEST[24], a biennial event that promotes global black unity through the celebration of pan-African culture and heritage; and the Joseph Project, a one-time event spearheaded by Jake Obetsebi-Lamptey, then the Minister of Tourism and Diasporan Relations aimed at reconciling the emotional, social and material gulf between Ghanaians and black/African diasporans.

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celebration commemorative fabric patterns. Each morning, the Sierra Leonean participants would comment on his outfit and discuss the celebrations, as reported on the BBC.

22. From Rawlings's point of view, the accusation of "witch-hunting" is the most damning—his wife is currently on trial for "willfully causing financial loss to the state", a criminal offense under Ghanaian law (GHANAWEB 2006).
23. Emancipation Day is an annual event in Ghana, but targets diasporan pilgrims rather than Ghanaian citizens. In Sierra Leone it is considered, by some Sierra Leoneans, a part of Sierra Leone's history worthy of celebration. The UK wanted to allot 22 million pounds to commemorate the bicentennial, but Freetown's mayor felt the money would be better spent helping those who experienced the greatest loss because of the slave trade, *i.e.* Africans living on the west coast of Africa. City officials suggested changing the British street names in downtown Freetown to reflect African contributions to abolition of the slave trade.
24. Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival.

"We Are not Tourists": Reconciling Foreignness, Capitalism and Affective Ties to "Home"

Roots travelers find many different routes to the "Motherland". Paulla Ebron has described how corporate entities like Heineken and McDonalds co-opted the tropes of "roots", "return" and "pilgrimage" in pursuit of profit. She suggests, however, that these instances of corporate capitalism are not necessarily antithetical to the aims of "authentic" pan-African identity construction. These identity constructions, she argues, are not the same as in the previous era of black American radicalism; nor are they entirely new. Whereas the black revolutionaries of the 1960s offered radical critiques of imperialism, capitalism and structural racism, contemporary African roots pilgrims are as likely to rely on more conservative tropes of individualism and personal responsibility. The relatively conservative posture of some modern-day African roots travelers makes the marriage between global capital and pan-African desire viable—a prospect that would have been untenable forty years ago.

Saidiya Hartman tracks a different but related trajectory for black diasporan pilgrimages to Africa that gradually shifts from the idealism of the 1960s to a more sober outlook in the 1990s:

> "In the sixties it was still possible to believe that the past could be left behind because it appeared as though the future, finally, had arrived; whereas in my age the impress of racism and colonialism seemed nearly indestructible. Mine was not the age of romance. The Eden of Ghana had vanished long before I ever arrived" (Hartman 2007: 37)

She adds that "unlike the scores of black tourists who, motivated by Alex Haley's *Roots,* [she] had traveled to Ghana and other parts of West Africa to reclaim their African patrimony. For [her], the rupture was the story" (*ibid.:* 42). We are wary of analyses which suggest that motivations for return can be easily schematized or dismissed as "romanticism"; Ebron and Hartman capture nicely the shifting ground on which diasporan African desires for return are constantly reshaped.

Some black Americans travel to Africa with Afrocentric tour groups that cater to their cultural-political agendas. The Ghana Roots Culture and Repatriation Tour, for example, is a diasporan African grassroots initiative sponsored by the Africa for the Africans Tours and Investments Group (AFTA)[25]. AFTA targets and attracts a broad range of clientele including medical doctors, Afrocentric scholars, blue collar workers, entrepreneurs and retirees. The travelers are generally working—to middle-class, college-educated and earn, on average, $35,000-$80,000[26]. The AFTA tours are expensive by Ghanaian standards; a ten-day excursion in 2008 cost $2,950. For travelers

25. <http://africafortheafricans.org/index.php>.
26. I thank Bomani Tyehimba, co-founder of AFTA, for these statistics.

from the "western" world, the relative strength of western currency can be of considerable economic advantage in "developing" nations. But these excursions can represent a significant financial sacrifice for many middle and working class black Americans.

The organization aims to foster deep, enduring ties between continental and diasporan Africans by promoting pan-African (black) nationalism, African investment, and "repatriation" to the "motherland". The program's brochure states: "Our mission is to reconnect our people with the motherland. Our main tool [...] is through tours. Organized tours have proven to be the most effective way to dispel the myths and negative propaganda that keeps Africa [and its diaspora] divided." The "divide" between African Americans and Africans has received modest public notoriety due to a spate of articles appearing in US newspapers and magazines from the early 1990s on (Boorstein 2001; Polgreen 2005; Rimer & Arenson 2004; Roberts 2005; Washington 1992; Zachary 2001). If the frequent, negative media portrayal of Africans and African Americans are any indication, this perspective about negative propaganda is warranted[27]. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to reduce *all* instances of divergence to propaganda; some of these differences result from the peculiar agendas and outlooks of the respective communities.

While in Ghana, the AFTA coordinators outlined an ambitious itinerary that had many participants struggling to keep up: a two-day conference designed to encourage investment in Africa; a video screening aimed at black/African consciousness raising; excursions to several slave castles and forts dotting Ghana's coastline and to *Fihankra*[28], a diasporan African township in the Eastern Region's Akwamu Traditional Area. During the conference, participants discussed strategies to liberate Africa and Africans in the diaspora, acquiring land, slavery reparations and repatriation. Many African Americans expressed a desire to return "home" and help Africa[29].

A Ghanaian presenter, Kwame Osei, asked black diasporans to "think of themselves as Africans". He complained that "non-Africans are dominating our economy", and that they [the non-Africans] were "not interested in emancipation" but, "exploitation". Osei urged his predominantly African American audience to "use your expertise to take back Africa"[30]. AFTA literature

27. Traveling throughout Africa, I (Benton) was asked whether I am a "nigga" from the "ghetto" or if I ever fear for my life (because there are so many guns and so much gang violence in America); in the US, upon hearing about my work in Africa, I often hear comments about how "hard it must be" to "see so much poverty and death". HUNTER-GAULT (2006) writes against these negative stereotypes about Africans, but she is in the minority.
28. Fihankra is an Akan adinkra symbol meaning the safety/stability/unity of the home.
29. Currently, there is no reliable estimate of African American expatriates living in Ghana, but unofficial estimates range from 1,000-5,000. The number is probably closer to 1,000.
30. Osei's outlook is more militant than Ghanaian officials or the "typical" Ghanaian. I (Shabazz) think, however, that it is important that Osei's views are given voice. Black radical thought in Ghana is rarely, if ever, the subject of

echoes this sentiment: "The investment portion of the tour is designed to promote a self-sufficient Africa by connecting the skills and resources of Africans in the Diaspora with projects, investment opportunities and like-minded brothers and sisters on the continent." The organizers invoke a sense of urgency: "In order for Africans to thrive and survive the war being waged against us globally, we must build a home base of power in Africa. We are at a critical stage in our existence; its Repatriation and Pan-Africanism or perish." Here, the organizers deploy warfare idiom with great effect, communicating the urgent need for collective black/African struggle, at once physical, mental, and spiritual.

The *Daily Graphic,* the paper of record in Ghana, published an article entitled, "Reject the Leadership Tourists" (Abbas 2007: 15). The article warns against supporting presidential aspirants who are "out of touch with the people" and lack a substantive relationship with their constituents. The article shows that the word "tourist" may have, for Ghanaians, the same negative connotation—that of fleetingness, or lack of intimacy with local realities and local people—for black diasporan sojourners to Africa. As a prominent female member of the black American expatriate community in Ghana put it, African American roots travelers have all have made a conscious decision to identify both politically and culturally with Africa, whereas the "typical" tourist might not.

Jasmyne Cannick, like many other roots travelers we talked to, expressed a sentiment that supports this claim. In an interview on National Public Radio about her May 2007 trip to Sierra Leone with actor, Isaiah Washington[31], Jasmyne remarked:

> "Well, anytime you travel to the Motherland, you have to go with a purpose. Isaiah's purpose in going was to check on the school that he's building in one of Sierra Leone's villages, Njalakendema. My reason for going [...] [is] because I wanted to go back home, and get in touch with my people. And that was the most liberating experience I've ever had in my entire life."

Yemi a thirty-something year-old dreadlocked African American attorney from Atlanta, Georgia, describes some challenges she faced trying to reconcile Ghanaian ascriptions of her foreignness with her own feelings of belonging during her trip to Ghana with the AFTA tour group:

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scholarly analysis and critique and such race-conscious Ghanaians are the obvious allies of African American roots tourists. Ghanaian sentiments about pan-African cooperation need not be informed by "black militancy", however; otherwise apolitical university students have, on several occasions, complained to me that African Americans "don't do enough to help Africa".

31. Isaiah Washington one of the best-known celebrities who has a DNA ancestry link to Sierra Leone, and in particular, to the Mende ethnic group. He is also one of the few who have initiated several visible projects there, and continues to contribute to social service initiatives, and publicize these contributions.

"I think that probably the thing that surprised me most in my experience here is that there were a lot of Ghanaians that perceived me as more like a European, a regular tourist. I didn't necessarily expect them to embrace me as if I were family *per se,* at least not all of them across the board, but I was surprised that they would go as so far as to view me the same as the European or Caucasian American [...] despite the fact that before I opened my mouth, I looked like any other African or Rastafarian [chuckles] walking the streets."

Yemi was especially disappointed when Ghanaians called her *"oburoni"* (usually translated as "white person" or foreigner)[32]. The feeling of being treated as a foreigner and, as several African American sojourners put it, like "a walking dollar bill", is a common sentiment among African Americans I (Shabazz) have interviewed. Some deeply resent this perceived treatment, while others express a sense of humor about it. And, of course, some African Americans concede that they can understand the local Ghanaian perspective. Traveling on private buses, walking around town with cameras and bulging backpacks, and toting bottled water, all mark one as a "tourist", despite protestations to the contrary.

Officials from the Sierra Leone tourism agency and the World Bank do little to contradict the idea that they are deeply invested in attracting African American dollars. They, too, highlight the potentially lucrative role of roots tourism in their development portfolios. According to an article on African tourism in the *African Investor* magazine (2007: 80): "Approximately 36 million Americans have African descent, 43 % of whom have some college or bachelor's degree. 'Niche marketing numbers don't get any better than this', says the World Bank report. The World Bank believes about fifteen million African Americans could be appropriately targeted with an information campaign on Bunce Island and motivated to visit".

African Americans interviewed in Ghana frequently cite racial oppression and *de-facto* second-class citizenship in the US as key motivations for traveling to Africa. They often told me (Shabazz) that they came to Ghana with the hopes of making or reinforcing a spiritual "connection" with Africa and, possibly, "repatriating" at a later date. And as these two women's accounts convey, the sense of unofficial exile and the concomitant reaction against US white racism is not the whole story—they also describe a deeply felt affinity with Africa and Africans.

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32. Numerous articles discuss the oburoni (sometimes spelled obruni) controversy (COATES 2006; HARTMAN 2007; HASTY 2002). During the Ghana@50 celebrations the Ghanaian government launched a campaign to "educate" Ghanaians on African American distaste for the term. The campaign encouraged Ghanaians to greet African Americans with the phrase akwaaba (Akan, "welcome") anyemi (Ga, "sibling"). Aside from a press conference and several akwaaba anyemi banners scattered throughout Accra, there was little effort to reinforce the program. This and the reshuffling at the Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations, meant that the "welcome sibling" campaign was shortlived and forgettable (although well-intended).

Fihankra: a Way Back Home

In 1994, the Ghana House of Chiefs, many other traditional authorities from Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Ivory Coast, and participants from the African diaspora, assembled to atone for the role of African chiefs in the transatlantic slave trade. The most important symbol of this atonement process was the purification of an animal skin and carved wooden stool. The stool is emblematic of chiefly authority among many ethnic groups in southern Ghana, most notably the Akan. Likewise, a ritually prepared animal skin has a consonant function for many of Ghana's northern groups.

The purification rites culminated with the appointment of Nana Kwadwo Oluwale Akpan, a diasporan African from Detroit, Michigan, as the custodian of the stool and skin. In 1997, Nana Akpan was nominated and appointed the *Fihankrahene* (chief of Fihankra), the sacred caretaker of 30,000 acres of stool-land[33] ceded to the group by the Akwamu traditional rulers and elders[34]. The allotment of land was a vital component of atonement and of the "reintegration" of diasporan Africans into African society. Lastly, Nana Akpan was designated as the first African American member of the Ghana House of Chiefs.

The Afro-politics of Style

Each year, Fihankra receives hundreds of African diasporan roots travelers hoping to live and/or invest in Africa. When the 40-strong AFTA group traveled to the Akwamu traditional area to see the Fihankra site, most members of the group displayed "coiffure politics"[35] or adhered to a loosely defined set of sartorial expressions paramount to an Afrocentric ethos: "natural" hair, or hair that has not been straightened with chemicals or hot metal combs; African jewelry, especially beads, cowrie shells or the *ankh,* the ancient Egyptian symbol of life; and brightly colored African shirts or t-shirts with Afrocentric messages:

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33. Land controlled by a traditional ruler.
34. According to the Ghanaian historian Akosua PERBI (2006), the Akwamu were prolific slave traders: "Of all the southern states of Ghana, the Akwamu state earned the greatest notoriety for slave raiding and kidnapping."
35. One enduring legacy of white supremacy and black subordination in the US are subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle messages about aesthetic preferences for "white" phenotypes, including "straight" hair. The African American rhythm and blues singer, Indie Arie, and the Senegalese rapper, Akon, scored a hit single on the topic. The lyrics capture the essence of coiffure politics nicely: "Good hair means curls and waves/Bad hair means you look like a slave/At the turn of the century/It's time for us to redefine who we be/You can shave it off like a South African beauty/Or get in on lock like Bob Marley/You can rock it straight like Oprah Winfrey/ If its not what's on your head/It's what's underneath" (ARIE 2006).

"Advantages of Melanin"
"Black to Our Roots"
"Sankofa"[36]
"Son of a Field Negro"
"Bring Back Black"

Or the names and images of (exclusively male) iconic figures:

"Fred Hampton"[37]
"Nat Turner"[38]
"Huey Newton"[39]
"Malcolm X"
"Kwame Nkrumah"

Nana Akpan, the African American Fihankrahene (paramount chief of the Fihankra township), delivered a brief, informal speech to AFTA and held a question-and-answer session. The Fihankra community, he stressed, is reserved for blacks "born in the Diaspora as a direct result of the transatlantic slave trade"; a "historical community" with a "historical purpose". He also explained that the community began with a "slavery apology ceremony" and that Fihankra aims to "contribute to reconstructing Africa" and "promote the reintegration of Africa with its diaspora". This reintegration would be spearheaded by diasporan Africans who had "acquired specific skills". Nana Akpan also announced an upcoming conference with the theme "A way back home", to be sponsored by the Fihankra movement. Stressing that Africa is "home", he urged the group to not view themselves as "regular tourists"[40]. Fihankra is by any standards in innovative experiment; it draws upon black diasporan and continental African notions of morality and restitution to establish a neo-"traditional" institution which aims to bridge the political, economic and socio-cultural divide between these two respective groups.

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36. Lit. "return, go, take". Sankɔfa (often anglicized as "Sankofa") is an Akan adinkra symbol frequently glossed as "return to your (African cultural) roots".
37. Fred Hampton was the young, charismatic chairman of the Black Panther Party's Illinois chapter. In 1969, an African American US government informant drugged Hampton; the Chicago police department and US federal agents killed Hampton while he was sleeping.
38. Nat Turner, in 1831, led the largest slave revolt in antebellum Southern United States.
39. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale co-founded the Black Panther Party in 1966, in Oakland, California.
40. During the write-up of this essay, Nana Kwadwo Akpan died unexpectedly in Togo. Fihankra officials have canceled the "A way back home" conference.

Jasmyne Goes to Sierra Leone... and Other Blog Tales

This section focuses on data collected from weblogs that featured discussion about African Americans' travel to Sierra Leone during my (Benton) eighteen months' fieldwork there. The interchange between Africans and African Americans through internet technologies highlights another way that these groups engage in dialogue and how they assert, contest, and generally, discuss Africanness in public forums. During my fieldwork, I (Benton) regularly read the weblog of Jasmyne Cannick, an African American journalist based in Los Angeles. Her blog focuses primarily issues of race, gender and sexuality in American culture, and her unabashed accounts of being a lesbian of African descent are read by dozens of people daily.

In late May 2007, Jasmyne alerted her readers that she had been invited by actor Isaiah Washington to accompany him on and document an upcoming trip to Sierra Leone. At the time, Isaiah Washington was building a primary school in Bo District, because of his genetic ties to the area; his maternal, or mitochondrial DNA, had matched a Mende sample in a commercial DNA database. During her trip with Washington, Jasmyne uploaded pictures of the sites she visited, including pictures of her trip to Bunce Island slave castle. Her comments focused on her "return". She urged others of African descent to do the same. Her narrative also reveals an explicit desire to help Sierra Leoneans to improve their life conditions, and a deeply felt affinity for the people she encountered on her trip:

> "It's taken me a week to get it together to write about my trip partly because I am still playing catch up but mostly because I am still processing everything I saw and did over there and all of the wonderful people that I met.
> I realize now what is important and what we all need to be fighting for are poverty and not just poverty in America, poverty around the world, more importantly in Africa, where much of the continent is still underdeveloped and still very much exploited, and sometimes by our own.
> Going to Sierra Leone changed my life and my vision of the world and I am grateful for the opportunity. I will never take food, clean running water, paved roads, electricity, and shelter for granted again in my life, nor will I be wasteful in my habits."

In addition to expressing her affinity with the "wonderful people" she met while she was in Sierra Leone, she implies, too, her place as American and African. She wants to live and work in solidarity with the people she met, while she also acknowledges greater consciousness of the daily hardships that many Sierra Leoneans face. Although many other African American travelers (my mother expressed similar feelings about Sierra Leone and Ghana, for example) express this sentiment, the weblog—as a forum for discussion and dissent—affords us the opportunity to gauge the responses of others to her story about her journey. Most striking were the ways that (self-identified) Africans who read her blog, reacted to Jasmyne's visit to Sierra Leone:

"I had goosebumps reading this! I am so happy you had such a once in a lifetime experience to go to Africa [...]. Being an African myself, I agree a lot of African Americans should try to go to Africa and visit. A lot of perspectives and prejuidices *[sic]* will be changed. There is so much good one can do with a little effort and doing away with some taken for granted luxuries we have here in the USA."

Another "native African" reader, John Akoli, wrote:

"Great thread, as a native African myself, it is always good to read how African American's *[sic]* feel when they go to the continent. Mr. Washington is doing great things, and hopefully God will bless him to continue to do so."

The two "African" responses to Jasmyne's trip demonstrate the beginnings of the breadth of potential African-African diasporan relations as imagined by Africans, and which are built on this notion of roots travel. Implied in the two statements here is that, first, there are misconceptions among African Americans about Africa, and, second, that visiting Africa is one way to debunk these misconceptions and resulting prejudices. In so doing, they suggest that these misconceptions and prejudices arise from lack of knowledge, knowledge which would usually be grounded in the experience of "being there". The authors of these statements, therefore, tell us that in completing a journey to Africa, we see things "as they are". Roots travelers, then, become conscious of the uneven distribution of resources among the world's people and how everyone is somehow implicated in these economic structures ("the continent is [...] very much exploited, and sometimes by our own"). Overall, the authors demonstrate that there are Africans who acknowledge their desire—if not obligation—for constructive, productive engagements with African Americans. And when African Americans make positive, affirming journeys to the continent, they somehow demonstrate, too, their commitment to fulfilling similar desires and obligations in the long term.

These types of responses to African American roots-related and philanthropic sojourns were not unique to Jasmyne's weblog. One of the (few) tourist sites encouraging travel to Sierra Leone[41], featured in its weblog a story about DNA pilgrims, who appear to make up the bulk of roots travelers to Sierra Leone. Okolo, a Sierra Leonean who recently moved back to Sierra Leone from the US and the moderator for the site, recounts the story of Isaiah Washington's DNA connection to Sierra Leone, as well as news about Oprah Winfrey's own test—which revealed a genetic connection to the Kpelle of Liberia. At the end of her piece, Okolo notes, "Anyway, what does this mean for Sierra Leone and other African countries? It means great opportunities for greater cooperation between Africans their brothers

41. <visitsierraleone.org>.

and sisters[42] scattered around the globe. This is one to follow with great interest as we will hear more stories such as those mentioned above in the coming years and will probably play a huge part in Africa's tourism industry in years to come".

Again, Okolo's reference to "brothers and sisters" suggest kin-like connectedness between Sierra Leoneans and Americans of African descent. It also indicates the potential for constructive collaboration between the two groups that is rooted in this sense of relatedness. In Okolo's narrative, the potential for enhanced collaboration between Sierra Leoneans and African Americans, however, is mostly realized through tourism (likely because this is a site dedicated to promoting tourism in Sierra Leone)—and philanthropic efforts. Such a distinction is noteworthy for this discussion, since it seems that African Americans, are again recognized in terms of what they contribute materially during their visits to the country. Tourism appears to be an end in and of itself.

Okolo's entry about Isaiah Washington's philanthropic efforts elicited nine reader comments. Six comments came from African Americans who had submitted a DNA sample for ancestry testing and "discovered" genetic links to Mende or Temne people, groups that are linked to present-day Sierra Leone. Two of the remaining three commenters were Sierra Leoneans who wholeheartedly agreed with the pan-African solidarity message advanced by Okolo. One of these commentators, "Iverson", noted:

> "I am very happy to hear all this good news about my brothers and sisters coming back to their homeland. We need to aware that we are all one from our shared history. I hope that one day all african desendants *[sic]* will be united as in one nation. Africans You *[sic]* need to open you your eyes and push away your oppressor. We wanna go home we have been on trail for too long. Every African should be proud to be an african. I love Sierra Leone till I die."

In addition to acknowledging his diehard nationalism and love for Sierra Leone, Iverson also recognizes a "shared history" of Africans on the continent

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42. During our dissertation field research in Ghana and Sierra Leone, we often heard Ghanaians and Sierra Leoneans refer to both strangers and friends of the same approximate generation as "brother" or "sister". These kinship idioms were deployed for a variety of purposes ranging from accentuating friendships, to defusing potentially violent conflicts, to negotiating fees or prices. Black Americans, especially during the 1960's, frequently addressed each other as "brother" or "sister". As MALCOLM X (1967) explained, "We've got to change our own minds about each other. We have to see each other with new eyes. We have to see each other as brothers and sisters. We have to come together with warmth so we can develop unity and harmony that's necessary to get this problem solved ourselves" (WILLIAMS 2004: 88). Black consciousness movements and the racism that these movements reacted against have popularized the notion that black/African people, wherever in the world they might reside, are siblings or cousins. Critics insist that, in the latter instance, these imagined familial ties occlude the many differences, often declared to be unbridgeable, within and between these respective groups.

and elsewhere. He also points to Africa as the site of return or homecoming for African Americans. More interestingly, his statement is aspirational in tone; Iverson expresses hope for unity between the groups. In his pan-African vision, he urges people of African descent to be proud of their roots, and use it as common ground for race and roots consciousness ("open your eyes") and overcoming oppressive race regimes ("push away your oppressor"). The remaining commenter, a Sierra Leonean living in the state of Maryland in the US, voiced a different opinion about the utility of African-African American alliances for improving the conditions experienced by the two groups. He suggested that Sierra Leoneans "clean their own backyard" before pursuing a relationship with Africans in the diaspora.

These data do not reflect a scientific, randomized study of African-African diaspora relations. They do, however, hint at the range and types of dialogue that can and do exist about what constitutes an African, and who should engage in African struggles. By engaging in these conversations, the members of these groups participate in an instructive public dialogue in which they assert claims about the challenge and value of African ancestry in effecting social change on the continent and in the African diaspora.

Jumping to Forget (and remember) Slavery

As suggested in the other sections, slavery and its commemoration attracts African roots tourism to both Ghana and Sierra Leone. And for obvious reasons: the capture and enslavement of Africans in the West is a key marker in the identity of African Americans. The extent to which slavery should be discussed or commemorated in national development agendas, however, varies within and between Ghana and Sierra Leone.

In her weblog account of her trip to Bunce Island slave castle in Sierra Leone, Jasmyne tells her readers: "[...] it's a life changing experience to walk in the footsteps of your ancestors as they did when they were slaves and to see what they saw [...]"[43]. For many African American sojourners to Africa, reverence for their enslaved ancestors who survived the Middle Passage is commemorated through various sacred rituals. Demonstrating this reverence through libations and prayers offered to the ancestors, for example, is an essential component of the Afrocentric diasporan socio-political consciousness. Those who perform these libations believe that the sacred umbilical chord with Africa is maintained and actualized through the ancestors.

But for many Ghanaian Christians, especially evangelicals, ancestor veneration is antithetical to religious faith. Nana, a Ghanaian graduate student at the University of Ghana, on several occasions told me (Shabazz) that the "ancestors are dead and gone, they can do nothing for you, and it is only

43. <www.jasmynecannick.com>.

through Jesus that we should offer prayers because it is through him that we receive salvation". Similarly, Mensa Otabil, a popular evangelical minister in Ghana, opines that African Americans are looking backward while Ghanaians are looking forward. He is critical of what he believes is the tendency of African Americans to romanticize African cultural traditions. "As an African, I consider our inability to renew our culture and move it from the definitions of our ancestors to be a major problem. Anyone who tells me to go back to my ancestors does not realize that I am already with my ancestors and I am trying to progress beyond their legacy!" (van Gorder 2008).

The legacy of slavery is pivotal for roots travelers to Ghana who want to reconnect with Africa. These travelers routinely visit monuments marking the slave trade, monuments that are being marketed by Ghanaian officials for precisely that purpose. For Ghanaians who look to the future with the same intensity, travelers' efforts to make sense of what happened and to honor their ancestors is a potential drag (Hartman 2002; Hasty 2002; Holsey 2008).

A British-Ghanaian colleague opined that African Americans are "recolonizing Ghana just as they did in Sierra Leone and Liberia". She suggested that this "recolonization" was not simply a material one, but also an ideational one. In her view, African Americans' ideas are hegemonic in African-African American dialogue and, in these discussions, African Americans "only want to talk about slavery". The colleague added, for emphasis, that "there is more to Ghana than slavery!". Thus, while some black Americans hold the opinion that slavery is not discussed enough in Ghana, some Ghanaians feel as if black Americans are preoccupied with the past, with little or no concern for or knowledge about contemporary Ghanaian challenges. This is probably what a Ghanaian acquaintance had in mind when he said (in a tone somewhere between exasperation and disdain) that Ghana had "too much culture". Both the official and everyday preoccupation with cultural identity was, in his view, emotionally taxing and unproductive. Only the most intransigent ideologue would disagree that slavery is the lone event in Ghana's history; but what remains unresolved is how to strike a balance between the desires and interests that diasporan and continental Africans express.

In Sierra Leone, monuments focusing on the slave trade form the cornerstone of efforts attempting to attract roots travel to the still-rebuilding country. There is likely less resistance among Sierra Leoneans to discussing the legacy of slavery, given its role in the founding of the nation, and given, at the very least, to early (ca. 1947) national commitment to commemorating African enslavement in the nation's history[44]. In an effort to rejuvenate

44. It is not clear whose agenda was advanced through declaring Bunce Island a national monument. It could have been that people in the so-called "hinterlands" were not aware of or interested in preserving this national monument, while colonial or, even Krio, authorities interests were best served.

an artifact that symbolically links Africans and Americans of African descent, Joseph Opala has recently turned his focus creating a computer reconstruction of Bunce Island, the site of West Africa's Rice Coast's largest slave castle (Casale 2005). After failed efforts by the US Park Service effort to rehabilitate the castle, now an endangered monument, a range of donors has supported this project. Wealthy African Americans, like Isaiah Washington, for example, have donated money toward this computer reconstruction, demonstrating the significance of these markers of the past among African Americans.

Still, to suggest that African Americans or other African diasporans are solely focused on slavery would be misguided. To the contrary, many diasporan Africans who travel to Africa understand that they are making a connection to people whose identities are not necessarily "bound up" with slavery and the denigration associated with the practice. DNA ancestry technology provides—at least symbolically—yet another "pre-slavery" link between African Americans and the African continent. As the African American wife said to her Nigerian scientist husband:

> "The great promise of genetic ancestry tracing to me as an African American is not just to know that I am from Africa—this is rather clear to me. The difference is I want to know what part of Africa I am from. The question is—is it possible to re-establish the link, sense of who you are, where your family is from? Can we find our family, the family we have been separated from? We are looking for the magic bullet [...]. Can DNA testing do this? It will be sufficient to know that my family is from Nigeria, Ghana etc. I just want to know the immediate beginning of my family history. Slavery robs us of so much—our culture, our heritage. The question is, can genetics fill this void? I see genetics as a tool to narrow down the possibilities" (Rotimi 2003).

The costs of these tests, which were once prohibitive, now range from as little as $189 to more than one thousand dollars. The tests are commercially available through for-profit agencies like African Ancestry and through nonprofit research efforts like the National Genographic Project. The tests are increasingly popular; African Ancestry cites that their business doubled every year for the first four years of operation (Bolnick *et al.* 2007). Profits for this company and others continue to grow, and additional companies with access to genetic material from African populations have materialized. The rapid uptake of these genetic ancestry services suggest that African Americans are trying to find (seemingly) incontrovertible evidence of personal and family histories and African membership prior to slavery[45].

45. The "jumping over" trope is key in black diasporan understanding of the role of slavery in their history. Black cultural nationalists, for instance, emphasize the centrality of slavery but in other instances avoid it all together. On its face, this practice seems contradictory, but when one teases out the effects of such discourses/practices, both, if leveraged effectively, can be "strategies" for dealing with slavery. The seemingly romantic Afrocentric version of "jumping" slavery is best exemplified by the black royalty—"when we were kings and queens"—

Afromance and the Art of Intimate "Readings"

One serious limitation of scholarship on African roots tourism is its preoccupation with intra-racial discord. These accounts generally treat African diasporic and African continental communities as discrete homogenous wholes that are then cast in dichotomous pairings. Besides the fact that this schema begs the important question of internal dynamism and diversity *within* each of the contrastive pairs (Skinner 1993), there are few accounts of the ample instances of race-conscious African Americans and Africans who successfully "read" each other—learning and refining the intimate counter-global concept and practice of what we call, for lack of a better term, "Afro-conjugal dialogue". In this section, we highlight a compelling example of this dialogic enterprise.

I (Shabazz) first met Joseph and Shelly while with a friend who was shopping for gifts in Ghana's capital, Accra. After exchanging greetings, I learned that Shelly was a "homegirl". She was from Compton, California, a few miles from my hometown, Inglewood. Compton's residents, like Inglewood's, are mostly poor and working class African and Hispanic Americans and undocumented immigrants from Central and South America. These groups fiercely compete for jobs, housing, education, health care, and a decent quality of life. In the US media, Compton is almost exclusively known for crime, poverty, drugs, violent gangs and other perceived social "pathologies"[46]; tourists are warned to avoid Compton[47].

Shelly's husband, Joseph, is a "Northerner", someone from any of the three regions of Northern Ghana—Upper East, Upper West, and Northern. Joseph is a native of Bawku[48], an important town in Ghana's Upper East Region. In precolonial times, Northern Ghana was ravaged by the transatlantic slave trade; a hugely disproportionate number of enslaved Africans were taken from the region. During the colonial era, the British kept the Northern territories in a perpetual state of underdevelopment because

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narratives. These black royalty narratives, if taken at face value, seem a historical and fanciful. But, in fact, they point to a deeper truth. These narratives function as indirect social criticism (AKYEAMPONG 2000: 194; YANKAH 1995: 51-52): a veiled declaration that black/African people are far better than their current condition of racial subordination. MALCOLM X (1967) argued that the white man's focus on slavery was a clever ploy to obscure the "true" history and identity of the Black man. Yet he also routinely invoked a polemical and ludic interpretation of plantation politics. And Lee D. BAKER (1998) points out how Herskovits, Frazier and Civil Rights strategists dueled over to whether or not to "jump over" the specter of slavery.

46. Besides this pervasive pathologization, Compton is sometimes exoticized as the home of Gangsta Rap.
47. For me (Shabazz), however, Compton is a place of endearment and scholarly growth. It is where my academic career took root. I made my first foray in Afrocentric scholarship as an undergraduate at Compton Community College.
48. Bawku as of late has featured prominently in Ghanaian print and broadcast media as a site of ethnic conflict.

Northerners were viewed as a ready source of unskilled labor. Schools and other markers of "development" arrived in the region relatively late. Today, a disproportionate number of Northerners subsist on mostly unproductive farms. These conditions have pushed many Northerners to seek an improved quality of life in southern Ghana where they are often socially stigmatized, politically marginalized, and hired for the most onerous physical tasks.

Afromantic Visions

Joseph recounted how he and his wife, Shelly, first met. Joseph was on a lunch break from the stall where he sells African crafts to tourists. He noticed Shelly sleeping on a tour bus parked in front of the restaurant where he was sitting. According to Joseph, it was love at first sight:

"*Joseph:* The first day I met her [...] I went to the shop and I told my mom 'you know what? I found my heart desire, and I found my love, and I found my wife'. And my mom was like, 'do you have a fiancee? You don't have any. Then how come you found your love?'"

Kwame: [laughs]...

"*J* [laughing]: [his mom continued] 'where she from?' Then I said, you will meet her. If you want to meet her, we [Joseph and Shelly] just meet. So she [Joseph's mother] will like to see her and see whether its true. Because when I am here [in my stall] a lot of people come to me, come to my way—blacks, whites, there are interested in me, they like me. They like my—they like the way I talk, you know? I always deal with them. I always [inaudible] to sell things for them [...] they didn't touch my heart, you know? Before you see somebody you love the person will [...] their spirit will talk, you know? And their spirit doesn't go with my spirit so I don't give my mind to them."

When Joseph told his parents he was marrying an African American, his mother said "do you know her well, do you think you can deal with her because their life is quite different than we, you know? Things [...] the way they talk, the way they do [...] everything is different". To that, Joseph responded, "Well [...] she is the one God chose for me. I think we are going to understand each other".

Shelly explained that Joseph was her "pure thought", her adolescent vision of her dream companion. Normative American notions of family life and adulthood circumvented these thoughts, she felt. Sons and daughters are sent off to college before they have fully developed into responsible adults. She said that whereas as American families are career-centered, African families are marriage-centered. The American system forestalls one's ability to mature into a proper spouse.

Joseph's grandfather had a dream about Joseph's future wife. His grandfather told him that he "would meet his wife very soon" and that she would be "fair".

"*J:* So I thought it was *oburoni* [white person] and I'm like 'me, I don't want to marry *oburoni*. You know, I told him, and like' [...]. And he is laughing at me and says 'why I don't want to marry *oburoni?*' I say 'no, *oburoni* is different, their everything is different'. And he says 'oh, you are going to meet someone who you like' [...]. I came back to Accra [...] two months exactly and I met her [looking at his wife]—*two months*."

I asked Shelly if there have been any challenges, cultural or otherwise, that have made their union difficult.

"S: When I look at him, he looks like me. And we think about some of the same stuff so much that [...]. Our Spirit is higher than any religion, any language, any color, or any culture, or any distance. You know, like I say 'my Spirit is African'. You know what I'm sayin? And just because I happen to be born somewhere else it doesn't stop me from being who I am, you know. Because if I was born on a plane, [...] you would still call me a person, I would still be a human being, you wouldn't [...] define me by my location [...] we go beyond any tangible, any physical, any material, any national definitions. Like our Spirit is higher than that. We have a mission that's been ordained and called by God so we see each other in a higher light [...]."

"The only [challenge] is [...] I wouldn't even say it's a problem. We're just learning how to communicate and that's important for the marriage, learning how to communicate non-verbally and verbally, you know? Its important because when we step out, we are one. So we are learning cues from each other. I'm learning how to read him when he tell me don't buy it and I really want it, and [repeating] he say don't buy it and I really want it, so I gotta learn how to read him."

Shelly's suggestion of learning to read is evocative. Collective suffering, skin pigmentation, and uncritical renderings of heritage will not suffice to create enduring, mutually satisfying relationships. Positive relationships between Africans and African Americans—fraternal, conjugal or otherwise—require serious work. The trope of "reading" bears a resemblance to the anthropological process of becoming culturally, linguistically, and socially competent as a field researcher. The ability to "read" seems to us an essential part of the pan-African dialogue.

*

"Whether we knew it or not [...] the Afro-American struggle is inextricably linked to the struggle in Africa and vice versa" (Kwame Nkrumah cited in Thelwell 2003).

The concept of African roots tourism is deployed for seemingly inchoate ends: African officials are seeking foreign capital; local Ghanaians/Sierra Leoneans desire tangible evidence of "development"; and African American pilgrims are pursuing a spiritual and cultural "connection" with the "Mother-

land"[49]. Despite African American ambivalence about the bourgeois connotations of touring, tourism creates the possibility for African and African Americans to establish meaningful social, political, cultural, and emotional ties. Further, as AFTA leaders assert, tourism can be an "effective way to dispel the myths and negative propaganda that keeps Africa divided". Much of the fledgling scholarship on African roots tourism is lost in a tangle of rhetoric while failing to see the possibilities, not to mention the enormous political stakes: global asymmetries that perpetuate poor quality of life for too many continental and diasporan Africans (Ake 2003; Chinweizu 1987a, 1987b; Clarke 1992; Ferguson 2006; Rodney 1994; Williams 1987; Zeleza 2003: 183-184).

Over ten years ago Obiagele Lake (1995) lamented that scholars generally depict Africans as having ideas about identity and things that matter that are wholly antithetical to their African American counterparts' (Hartman 2002; Lake 1995). We agree. Hasty (2002) does grant a modest concession in this direction, but leaves the impression that Africans and African Americans have little or no common ground. African American ideas are presented as idealistic and not grounded in the everyday reality of Africans, while their African counterparts are presumably only concerned with their immediate material needs. This Manichean contrast between diasporan idealism and African realities, is, in our estimation, exaggerated. This characterization does not fully capture the richness of African and black diasporan encounters[50]. When African Americans travel to Africa it is inevitable that some Africans and some African Americans will be disenchanted and disappointed. We do not deny inevitability of cross-cultural discordance, but we do think it is important to devote analytical attention to the full range of pan-African encounters. Many are positive and mutually affirming. Some even develop into "Afromances".

A second issue is that when people claim a historical rootedness in particular locales, their claims are often emotional. Are emotional ties incompatible with clear-thinking scholarship? Normative ideas among social scientists would have us believe so. As anthropologists, we have few tools for analyzing emotion that do not exoticize the subjects of our inquiries (Hooks 2001; Mead 2001)[51]. This raises a more controversial point. We

49. These are merely starting points for interrogating complex social relations, not stable categories of divergent interests. Some continental Africans are passionate about "connecting" with their African American "cousins" and there are African Americans roots tourists who exclusively seek profit-generating ventures in Africa.

50. It is remarkable that these respective groups still reach out to one another at all given that the vast majority of African Americans have lived for generations in the US while constantly being fed negative media images of Africa. The same media generally depicts African Americans as unintelligent or "natural athletes or entertainers", or worse, pathologically violent.

51. It would, of course, be unwise to reduce Mead's work to a simple matter of what Andrew APTER (1992: 244) has called, in a different context, "exotic alterity". Moreover, Mead, to her credit, explicitly states the political aim of her cultural project: a critical social commentary on gender, sexuality and conjugal norms in the "west".

believe that the highly emotive nature of roots-related field research makes cross-racial communication difficult. Many African American roots travelers and, to a lesser degree, their race-conscious African counterparts, are dismissive of mainstream scholarship in general, and white scholars in particular. While we make no judgment on this issue, it is important to note its existence. This is not to say, however, that Blackness/Africanness is a prerequisite for "getting it right". There are black intellectuals who pathologize black populations (*e.g.* Patterson 2006), some to the extent of reducing Africa to a site of "ignorance, squalor, and disease" (Crouch 1995: 81; Richburg 1998). We will leave the final word with one of our many articulate interlocutors, Shelly:

"The city of Compton is called the hub [...] because it connects L.A. (Los Angeles), Watts, Lynwood, Long Beach, Paramont, Cerritos [...]. You know, it connects these cities. And so, Ghana being the hub for the African spirituality worldwide. For the Brazilian African to come and be able to say 'oh, I'm African'. I can come here to get [...] grounded in my African spirituality. I don't necessarily have get my DNA traced back and go back to the middle of the Congo to say 'this is where I'm from' because we just want to show you the natural law. You mixed up all they way around, but that doesn't even matter because the base of you is African so come and find your own level. And I think Ghana is gonna be the place where [black] people gone come—all over the world [...] to come and find their level."

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ABSTRACT

In many "developing" and post-conflict African nations, cultural tourism has been touted as a vital source of foreign exchange revenue for jumpstarting national development. This trend has led to a scramble in Africa by African state officials seeking to "package" their nations in order to attract the patronage of Diasporan "returnees"—descendants of the Middle Passage who travel to Africa in search of cultural and historical "roots". This situation is further complicated by the fact that the planning and execution of national "packaging" frequently bypasses the ordinary citizen. Thus the official agenda of these nation states is sometimes at odds with the aspirations of local citizens and pan-African sojourners. Moreover, this trend has contributed to considerable conceptual slippage and, consequently, vociferous debates over the meaning of and criteria for asserting Africanness. In other instances, these conjunctures have transformed and enhanced received notions of African identity. An ethnographic comparison of a developing nation (Ghana) and a post-conflict nation (Sierra Leone) can both deepen and complicate our understandings of this emerging pan-African phenomenon and its attendant possibilities and limitations. We consider how these complimentary and conflicting interests, beliefs, and practices converge to shape novel modes of pilgrimage, nationhood, transnational dialogue, and globalization.

RÉSUMÉ

« Trouver sa place » — Tourisme de racines africaines-américaines en Sierra Leone et au Ghana. — Dans beaucoup de « pays en voie de développement » et dans les nations africaines sortant d'un conflit armé, on a vanté les mérites du tourisme culturel comme une source essentielle de revenu pour faire redémarrer le développement national. Cette tendance a entraîné une ruée chez les fonctionnaires africains pour vendre une certaine image de leur pays dans le but d'attirer la clientèle « de la diaspora » : les descendants du Middle Passage qui voyagent en Afrique à la recherche de « leurs racines » culturelles et historiques. Cette nouvelle situation est encore compliquée par le fait que l'organisation et la réalisation d'un programme de promotion nationale négligent fréquemment le citoyen ordinaire. Ainsi, le programme de ces États-nations est parfois en désaccord avec les aspirations des habitants locaux et des touristes pan-africains. De plus, cette tendance a contribué à un dérapage conceptuel considérable, et a eu, pour conséquence, des débats véhéments sur le sens et sur les critères de l'africanité. Dans d'autres cas, cette situation a transformé et durci les idées reçues sur l'identité africaine. Une comparaison ethnographique d'un pays en développement, le Ghana, avec un pays sortant d'un conflit armé, le Sierra Leone, peut approfondir et diversifier la compréhension de ce phénomène panafricain émergent ainsi que de ses possibilités afférentes comme de ses limites. Nous examinons comment ces intérêts complémentaires et contradictoires, ces croyances et ces pratiques convergent pour former de nouveaux modes de pèlerinage, de nationalité, de dialogue transnational et de mondialisation.

Keywords/*Mots-clés:* Ghana, Sierra Leone, African Diaspora, African-centered, identity, pan-Africanism, post-conflict, roots, tourism, transnationalism/*Ghana, Sierra Leone, diaspora africaine, identité, pan-africanisme, post-conflit, racines, tourisme, transnationalisme.*